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ABSTRACT

Noting the diversity in the nature and format of individual events in debate tournaments, a study surveyed the reactions of individual events coaches and students to the events offered at tournaments, the descriptions, and the time limits. Thirty-one coaches and 71 students from colleges and universities in the eastern United States responded to a set of comparison statements addressing three primary areas of consistency versus diversity in individual events: (1) tournaments offering both national and nonnational events versus those that offer only national events, (2) a nationally accepted description of events versus descriptions developed by individual tournament directors, and (3) nationally accepted time limits versus time limits determined by individual tournament directors. The survey results indicated that, overall, both coaches and students preferred tournaments offering diversity--both national and nonnational events--over those offering national events only. A majority of both coaches and students preferred to attend tournaments that use nationally accepted descriptions of events rather than the diversity of descriptions developed by individual tournament directors. A majority of both coaches and students also preferred to attend tournaments that adhere to nationally accepted time limits for events. (HTH)

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CONSISTENCY VS. DIVERSITY IN TOURNAMENT EVENTS: A SURVEY OF COACHES AND COMPETITORS

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As the level of participation in individual events as well as the competitive nature of the activity has continually strengthened during the past decade, so too have the number of local tournaments increased throughout the country. With the growth of individual events in recent years, tournament directors, coaches, and students have become increasingly interested in the diversity this activity affords. Since no national organization dictates tournament format, local tournament directors are given the opportunity to determine the individual events they will offer at a given tournament, a description of those events, and time limits for the events. As a result, tournament directors, coaches, and students have generated considerable informal discussion concerning the direction local tournaments should take.

An exhaustive review of literature reveals a paucity of study which explores reactions of the forensic community focused on the format of individual events tournaments. Because such information may be helpful in guiding tournament directors as they establish their own tournament format, the need to quantify forensic community reactions to these issues seems appropriate. In an effort to solicit such input and initiate such study, the purpose of this research is to explore individual events coach and student reactions to the following three issues: 1) events offered at tournaments, 2) event descriptions, and 3) event time limits.

METHODOLOGY

To explore both coach and student preferences, a survey was conducted among coaches and students from thirty-two colleges and universities

representing fifteen Eastern states ranging geographically from Maine to Florida. Of these schools, sixteen responded to provide a total return rate of 47%.[1] The 105 respondents in this survey included thirty-one coaches (97% of whom had attended a national tournament) and seventy-four students (76% of whom had attended a national tournament).

For the survey, coaches and students were asked to react to a set of comparison statements addressing three primary areas of consistency versus diversity in individual events: 1) tournaments which offer both national and non-national events versus tournaments which offer only national events; 2) a nationally-accepted description of events versus events with descriptions developed by individual tournament directors; and 3) nationally-accepted time limits for events versus time limits determined by individual tournament directors . In each of these general areas, respondents reacted to four separate statements generated from the following constructs: 1) tournament attendance, 2) educational value, 3) energy expended, and 4) quality of competition. Using a seven point Likert-type summated scale, responses ranged from "strongly disagree" as a "1" to "strongly agree" as a "7," with "4" as the "neutral" position. The order of the twelve items in the instrument as well as the order of the comparison was determined by a random selection process. Responses to the items in the survey will be presented and discussed individually.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Events Offered

Currently the American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament[2] offers ten national events while the National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals[3] offers nine national events.

Both tournaments provide competition in prose interpretation, poetry interpretation, dramatic duo interpretation, persuasive speaking, expository speaking, after-dinner speaking, rhetorical criticism (called communication analysis at the AFA Tournament), extemporaneous speaking, and impromptu speaking. In addition, the AFA Tournament offers competition in dramatic interpretation. Thus, a tournament throughout the year which includes only national events would traditionally offer any or all of these events. While there are tournaments which offer only these events, tournaments may offer all or a portion of these events combined with any number of non-national events such as epideictic speaking, demagogic speaking, literary criticism, readers' theatre, and impromptu sales.

Items 2, 5, 8, and 12 on the questionnaire focused on the events offered at individual events tournaments; scores on the Likert-type scale were converted to reflect the comparative perspective of preference for offering both national and non-national events at tournaments. When presented with the questionnaire item "I would prefer to attend tournaments which offer both national and non-national events rather than tournaments which offer only national events," the subjects' mean response was 5.2. A majority of both coaches and students prefer to attend tournaments which offer both national and non-national events (C = 5.2; S = 5.2)[4] suggesting a general preference for diversity of events offered. On the questionnaire item "I would prefer to focus my energy on both national and non-national events rather than only national events," the subjects' mean response was 5.0. Again, a majority of both coaches and students prefer to expend forensic energy on both national and non-national events, though student preference in this area was not as strong as coach preference (C = 5.0; S = 4.9) on this item. When responding to the questionnaire

item "the educational experience provided by tournaments offering both national and non-national events is stronger than the educational experience provided by tournaments offering only national events," the subjects' mean response was 5.4. While student respondents demonstrated a stronger preference on this item, a majority of both coaches and students prefer the educational experience provided by tournaments which offer such diversity (C = 5.2; S = 5.4). Finally, when presented with the questionnaire item "the quality of competition at tournaments offering both national and non-national events is stronger than the quality of competition at tournaments offering only national events," the subjects' mean response was 4.3 --the most neutral response in the survey. In addition, this questionnaire item reflected the greatest disparity between coaches and students (C = 3.8; S = 4.6)--a mean difference of .8. Students perceive a higher quality of competition at tournaments offering such diversity compared with those tournaments offering only national events while forensic coaches do not perceive such quality.

Overall, with a mean of 5.0 both coaches and students expressed a preference for tournaments which offer diversity--both national and non-national events rather than tournaments which offer only national events. Perhaps it is most interesting to note that the respondents' strongest preference for tournaments which offer diversity rests with the perceived educational values these events provide while the weakest preference for these tournament event offerings focused on the quality of competition at tournaments which offer diversity of events. This discrepancy may suggest that there is perceived educational value in

providing a variety of events in which students may compete, but to do so may weaken the quality of that educational experience.

Description of Events

Language choice in the majority of the event descriptions are similar for both the AFA Tournament and the NFA Tournament. Perhaps the greatest difference in the description of events occurs in the rhetorical criticism/communication analysis event. For the NFA Tournament, a "critical methodology" must be employed while the AFA Tournament allows the use of any "rhetorical communication principles." In addition, while a manuscript may be used at the AFA Tournament, a manuscript is not permitted at the NFA Tournament. Finally, judges at the NFA Tournament are permitted to ask a question at the conclusion of the speech, but the AFA Tournament rules do not include a provision for such a question.

Regardless of these minor discrepancies, most coaches and contestants would probably agree that there is general consistency in the description of events between the two national tournaments; in fact, contestants who attend both national tournaments are usually able to use the same material in a given event for both tournaments. While the event descriptions developed for the two national tournaments may be somewhat consistent, however, there is nothing to prevent an individual tournament director from developing his/her own event descriptions. For example, an interpretive event description may vary in the number of selections permitted, the number of characters permitted, and the use of movements as well as props in the interpretation process. Original event descriptions may vary on specific purpose of the speech, style of delivery (i.e., memorized, notes, manuscript), and use of audio-visual aids. Event descriptions

developed by individual tournament directors can provide considerable diversity in the activity.

Items 1, 6, 9, and 10 on the questionnaire focused on the description of events offered at individual events tournaments; scores on the Likert-type scale were converted to reflect the comparative perspective of preference for a nationally-accepted description of events. When presented with the questionnaire item "I would prefer to attend tournaments which offer a nationally-accepted description of events rather than a description of events developed by individual tournament directors," the subjects' mean response was 5.0. A majority of both coaches and students prefer to attend tournaments which use a nationally-accepted description of events (C = 5.3; S = 4.9), indicating a general preference for consistency in this area. Since coaches indicate a considerably stronger preference for consistency in event descriptions than do students, these findings may indicate that a large portion of the responsibility for adapting material for a variety of event descriptions rests with coaches who perceive it as a burden. When responding to the questionnaire item "I would prefer to focus my energy on events with nationally-accepted descriptions rather than events with descriptions developed by individual tournament directors," the subjects' mean response was 5.2. A majority of both coaches and students prefer to expend their energy on events that use a nationally-accepted description. Of the items which focus on the description of events, this items reflects the greatest disparity between coach and student preferences (C = 5.5; S = 5.0). Coaches clearly prefer to expend their energy on events with nationally-accepted descriptions rather than events with descriptions developed by the individual tourna-

ment directors. This strong preference for consistency from coaches may serve to reinforce the importance of national recognition for programs and schools--a perspective probably more appreciated by coaches than students. On the questionnaire item "the educational experience provided by events using nationally-accepted descriptions is stronger than the educational experience provided by events described by individual tournament directors," the subjects' mean response was 4.8. While a majority of both coaches and students prefer the educational experience provided by a nationally-accepted description of events, this preference is not as strong as preferences expressed on tournament attendance and energy expended (C = 4.7; S = 4.9). Finally, in responding to the questionnaire item "the quality of competition in events using nationally-accepted descriptions is stronger than the quality of competition in events described by individual tournament directors," the subjects' mean response was 4.9. Again, while a majority of both coaches and students perceive the quality to be stronger with events using nationally-accepted descriptions, students indicated a stronger commitment to that position than did coaches (C = 4.8; S = 5.0).

Overall, with a mean of 5.0 both coaches and students expressed a preference for tournaments which adhere to the consistency of nationally-accepted event descriptions rather than the diversity of descriptions developed by the individual tournament directors. The area in which both coaches and students expressed the strongest preference concerned the energy expended on these events; both prefer to expend energy on events which reflect a nationally-accepted description.

Time Limits

While there has previously been diversity in time limits between the AFA Tournament and the NFA Tournament, in recent years both tournaments have adopted a ten-minute maximum time limit for all events except extemporaneous and impromptu speaking. In these events, both tournaments adhere to a seven minute maximum time limit. This consistency, however, is not necessarily reflected in local tournaments held throughout the country. Some tournament directors specify minimum time limits as well as employing maximum time limits that may be less than those used at the national tournaments. For example, one local tournament might set the time limit for after dinner speaking at 6-8 minutes while another tournament might set it at 9 minutes maximum or one tournament might set impromptu speaking at 6 minutes maximum while another tournament sets it at 10 minutes maximum. As a result, coaches and students are expected to develop and/or modify material to accommodate these varying time limits from one tournament to the next.

Items 3, 4, 7, and 11 on the questionnaire focused on the time limits used at individual events tournaments; scores on the Likert-type scale were converted to reflect the comparative perspective of preference for nationally-accepted time limits. When presented with the questionnaire item "I would prefer to attend tournaments which use nationally-accepted time limits for events rather than time limits for events determined by individual tournament directors," the subjects' mean response was 5.9. A majority of both coaches and students prefer to attend tournaments which adhere to nationally-accepted time limits (C = 6.0; S = 5.8). In responding to the questionnaire item "I would prefer to

focus my energy on events using nationally-accepted time limits rather than on events with time limits determined by individual tournament directors," the subjects' mean response was also 5.9. A majority of both coaches and students prefer to expend their energy on events using nationally-accepted time limits (C = 6.2; S = 5.7). Of all the items on the survey, this is the item in which coaches demonstrated the strongest preference and a mean difference of .5 stronger than students. This preference may suggest that coaches are given the heaviest burden in helping students adapt their material to varying time limits; as a result, they are opposed to the amount of energy expended on such activity.
On the questionnaire item "the educational experience provided by events using nationally-accepted time limits is stronger than the educational experience provided by events with time limits determined by the individual tournament directors," the subjects' mean response was 5.0. A majority of both coaches and students perceive the educational experience provided by consistent time limits to be stronger than the educational experience provided by diverse time limits. Interestingly, on this item coaches were more committed to consistency of time limits than the students (C = 5.2; S = 4.9). These results suggest that coaches are often thrust into the role of adapting the students' material to time limits rather than the students themselves; as such, coaches may question the educational value of diversity in this area. Finally, when presented with the questionnaire item "the quality of competition in events with time limits determined by individual tournament directors is stronger than in events using nationally-accepted time limits," the subjects' mean response was 5.1. While a majority of both coaches and students perceive the quality

of competition to be stronger when using consistent time limits, students demonstrate a stronger perception of that quality than do coaches (C = 4.8; S = 5.2).

Overall, with a mean of 5.5, both coaches and students prefer nationally-accepted time limits rather than those developed by the individual tournament directors. Of the three areas explored in this survey, both coaches and students indicate the strongest preference in this area--a preference for consistency with nationally-accepted time limits.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this research presents a preliminary investigation into the preferences of both coaches and students for consistency versus diversity in individual events, it is only the first step necessary to investigate this aspect of the forensic activity. With this initial investigation, however, the authors clearly recognize the need for continued research to identify and explore the extent to which these preferences exist as well as their impact on individual events.

First, similar research which surveys the preferences of coaches and students across the nation should be conducted. While this study provided information concerning the preferences of Eastern coaches and students, these preferences may or may not be reflective of a national norm. If such preferences were to reflect the need for more diversity or more consistency in any of these areas, this research should provide the impetus for exploring the direction and focus these changes should take.

Second, this study indicated a preference for tournaments which offer <u>both</u> national and non-national events; however, there was no attempt

to explore which non-national events are preferred. A survey seeking preferences concerning these events might allow for the development of some consistency among these events. In addition, consistent use of specific non-national events over a period of time may provide the data necessary to justify incorporating some of these events at the national tournaments. Until such an effort is undertaken, however, any movement to develop new events for national competition may be somewhat limited in scope.

Finally, a survey among coaches and students who attend the national tournaments may explore the desirability to seek more consistency in the events offered as well as event descriptions between the two national tournaments. While the two tournaments have moved closer together in time limits and most event descriptions, there are changes that could be made in an effort to provide even more consistency in event description and events offered.

CONCLUSION

While this research is somewhat limited in its scope, it does provide an initial exmination of both coaches and students concerning preferences for events offered, description of events, and time limits. It appears important to note that for the most part coaches' and students' perceptions on the issues covered by the survey are quite similar. Both coaches and students perceive some educational value in attending local tournaments that do not restrict their events only to those offered at the national tournaments. Both coaches and students feel that the expenditure of energy devoted to those non-national events is worthwhile. This preference should provide a clear signal to local tournament directors:

offering non-national events as well as national events should strengthen the attractiveness of a tournament. This finding also seems to suggest that both coaches and students are not compelled to view their forensics experience simply in terms of events that will be utilized at a national championship level. However, when dealing with events offered at the national championship level, both coaches and students prefer standardization of event descriptions. Thus, tournament directors might wish to be less "creative" in their description of events offered at local tournaments and instead rely more heavily on those descriptions developed by the national organizations.

Finally, local tournament directors should heed the strong preference of both coaches and students for adherence to time limits at local tournaments which conform to those of the national tournaments. Since both coaches and students strongly prefer to attend tournaments which adhere to these national time limits, the attractiveness and ultimate "draw" for a local tournament may be significantly influenced by the time limit decisions made by the local tournament director.

NOTES

[1]Fred N. Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1964), p. 414. According to Kerlinger, a return rate of 40-50% is considered "normal" in the use of mail questionnaires.

[2]For ease of reading, this tournament will be referred to as "the AFA Tournament" throughout the discussion.

[3]For ease of reading, this tournament will be referred to as "the NFA Tournament" throughout the discussion.

[4]For ease of reading, the notation "C" refers to coaches' mean score and "S" refers to students' mean score throughout the discussion.

INDIVIDUAL EVENTS SURVEY

We are conducting a survey of both coach and student attitudes toward individual events. Complete respondent anonymity will be preserved. Thank you for your assistance in our research.

Upon completion, please return the survey to your coach as quickly as possible.

1. In working with events that are offered at the national championships, I would prefer to attend tournaments which offer a description of events developed by individual tournament directors rather than a nationally-accepted description of events.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I would prefer to attend tournaments which offer only national events rather than tournaments which offer both national and non-national events.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. In working with events that are offered at the national championships, the educational experience provided by events using nationally-accepted time limits is stronger than the educational experience provided by events with time limits determined by individual tournament directors.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. In working with events that are offered at the national championships, I would prefer to attend tournaments which use nationally-accepted time limits for events rather than time limits for events determined by individual tournament directors.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I would prefer to focus my energy on both national and non-national events rather than only national events.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. In working with events that are offered at the national championships, I would prefer to focus my energy on events with nationally-accepted descriptions rather than events with descriptions developed by individual tournament directors.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. In working with events that are offered at the national championships, I would prefer to focus my energy on events with time limits determined by individual tournament directors rather than events using nationally-accepted time limits.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. The educational experience provided by tournaments offering only national events is stronger than the educational experience provided by tournaments offering both national and non-national events.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. In working with events that are offered at the national championships, the educational experience provided by events described by individual tournament directors is stronger than the educational experience provided by events using nationally-accepted descriptions.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. In working with events that are offered at the national championships, the quality of competition in events using nationally-accepted descriptions is stronger than the quality of competition in events described by individual tournament directors.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. In working with events that are offered at the national championships, the quality of competition in events with time limits determined by individual tournament directors is stronger than in events using nationally-accepted time limits.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. The quality of competition at tournaments offering both national and non-national events is stronger than the quality of competition at tournaments offering only national events.

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please complete the following demographic data:

Current Individual Events Participation: Coach____ Student____

Sex: Female____ Male____

Attended a National Collegiate Individual Events Tournament: Yes___ No___

Please feel free to make any additional comments on the reverse side of this sheet.